

## CLAIMS

We claim:

1 1. An authentication method for electronic mail, comprising the steps of:  
2 preparing electronic mail for sending from an originator to a recipient;  
3 including in an open field of the electronic mail an authentication key associated with the  
4 originator and known to the recipient; and  
5 sending the electronic mail from the originator to the recipient.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the open field is a subject line of the electronic mail.

3. An authentication method for electronic mail, comprising the steps of:  
2 preparing electronic mail for sending from an originator to a recipient;  
3 reading from a memory an authentication key associated with the originator;  
4 including the authentication key in an open field of the electronic mail; and  
5 sending the electronic mail from the originator to the recipient.

1 4. The method of claim 3, wherein the electronic mail has a subject line, and the open field of  
2 the electronic mail is the subject line.

1 5. The method of claim 3, wherein the authentication key associated with the originator is  
2 further associated with the recipient.

1 6. An authentication method for electronic mail, comprising the steps of:

receiving electronic mail from an originator;

determining whether an authentication key is present in an open field of the electronic  
mail;

when an authentication key is present, determining whether the authentication key is  
associated with the originator; and

rejecting the electronic mail when the authentication key is not associated with the  
originator.

1 7. The method of claim 6, wherein the open field is a subject line of the electronic mail.

8. An authentication method for electronic mail, comprising the steps of:

receiving electronic mail from an originator;

determining whether an authentication key is expected to be present in an open field of

the electronic mail;

when an authentication key is expected to be present, determining whether the authentication key is present; and

rejecting the electronic mail when the authentication key is not present.

1 9. An authentication method for electronic mail, comprising the steps of:

2 receiving electronic mail from an originator;

3 determining whether an authentication key is expected to be present in an open field of  
4 the electronic mail;

5 when an authentication key is expected to be present, determining whether the  
6 authentication key is present;

7 when the authentication key is not present, rejecting the electronic mail; and

8 when the authentication key is present, determining whether the authentication key is  
9 associated with the originator, accepting the electronic mail when the authentication key is  
10 associated with the originator, and rejecting the electronic mail when the authentication key is  
11 not associated with the originator.

1 10. The method of claim 9, wherein the step of determining whether an authentication key is  
2 expected to be present in an open field of the electronic mail further includes the step of reading  
3 a memory at an address that is dependent upon a source identifier that identifies the originator.

1 11. The method of claim 9, wherein the step of determining whether the authentication key is  
2 associated with the originator further includes the step of reading a memory at an address that is  
3 dependent upon a source identifier that identifies the originator.

1 12. An authentication method for electronic mail, comprising the steps of:

2 preparing electronic mail for sending from an originator to a recipient;

3 sending the electronic mail from the originator to the recipient;

4 receiving the electronic mail from the originator;

5 determining whether an authentication key is present in an open field of the electronic  
6 mail;

7 when an authentication key is present in the open field, determining whether the  
8 authentication key present in the open field is associated with the originator; and

9 rejecting the electronic mail when the authentication key is not associated with the  
10 originator.

1 13. An authentication method for electronic mail, comprising the steps of:

2 preparing electronic mail for sending from an originator to a recipient;

3 sending the electronic mail from the originator to the recipient;

4 receiving the electronic mail from the originator;

5 determining whether an authentication key is expected to be present in an open field of  
6 the electronic mail;

7 when an authentication key is expected to be present, determining whether the  
8 authentication key is present; and

9 rejecting the electronic mail when the authentication key is not present in the open field  
10 of the electronic mail.

1 14. An authentication method for electronic mail having a subject line, comprising the steps of:  
2 preparing electronic mail for sending from an originator with a source identifier to a  
3 recipient with a destination identifier;  
4 sending the electronic mail from the originator to the recipient;  
5 receiving the electronic mail from the originator;  
6 determining whether an authentication key is expected to be present in an open field of  
7 the electronic mail;  
8 when an authentication key is expected to be present, determining whether the  
9 authentication key is present;  
10 when the authentication key is present, determining whether the authentication key is  
11 associated with the originator and further associated with the recipient;  
12 accepting the electronic mail when the authentication key is determined to be associated  
13 with the originator and the recipient;  
14 rejecting the electronic mail when the authentication key is determined not to be  
15 associated with the originator and further associated with the recipient; and,  
16 when the authentication key is not present, rejecting the electronic mail.